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*Idleness in Spiritual Affairs,
2379. an inexcusable Sin.*

A
SERMON

PREACH'D in the
PARISH-CHURCH
OF
HARTLEBURY,
IN THE
County of WORCESTER.

On Septuagesima-Sunday,
FEBRUARY 6. 1725.

By *W. BROUGHTON*, M. A.
Master of the Free Grammar-School there,
and Rector of *Rushock* in the said County.

L O N D O N:

Printed for JAMES HOWARD, Bookseller
in *Kidderminster, Worcestershire*. MDCCXXVI.

Address in Spiritual Affairs
an inexcusable Sin

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among us
Now it is the

Right Reverend Father in God,

7 O H N

Lord Bishop of Worcester

My LORD,



HE favourable Opinion
of this plain Discourse,
Your LORDSHIP was
pleas'd to expresse upon
it's Delivery from the Pulpit, was
much more than I expected: And
Your engaging me to publish it, to
be distributed in Your Neighbour-
hood, a perfect Surprize to me.

A shameful Neglect of the great
Duties of Religion, Your LORD-
SHIP, with all good Men, cannot
but

W. Broughton
A 2

i) **DEDICATION**
but be sensible prevails too much
among us.

Now if the honest Design of dis-
suading Men from it (which was
my only aim in pitching upon the
Subject) is in any measure better an-
swer'd by making it publick: Such
as receive any Benefit thereby, are
entirely indebted to Your LORD-
SHIP; and I have the Satisfaction of
giving this clear Testimony, with
what dutiful Respect and Submission
I am,

Your LORDSHIP'S

Most obedient SON,

A N D

Obliged, humble Servant,

W. Broughton.



MATTH. XX. 6, 7.

And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye all the day idle?

They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us: He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard, and what soever is right, that shall ye receive.



TH E Words are *Verbum Diei*, part of the Gospel for the Day, and therefore the more proper for our present Meditation. And they are part of a Parable, by which our blessed Lord, under the similitude of a Householder going out to hire Labour-

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Labourers into his Vineyard, teaches his Disciples and Followers, that God is no Debtor to Man for any of his Works; but that all his Rewards are gratuitous and free.

Now teaching by Parables is a very affecting way of Instruction; because Doctrine is thereby brought to our Senses.

It was very customary (it seems) in the *Eastern Countries*; and approved by our Saviour's frequent Use of it.

But, however, 'tis requisite we should use Caution, both in reading and expounding Parabolical Scripture; and always look to the main Scope and Design of the Parable; making that the Key to unlock its mystical Meaning: The Parts of it being not to be strain'd farther than the Drift of the Place, or Analogy of other Scripture will bear us out.

And therefore tho' upon this Account it is not so safe drawing positive Doctrine from a Parable, as from other Scripture; yet being cautiously handled, Scripture Parables afford us many useful and affecting Meditations: As, I hope, this that we have now under Consideration, by the blessing of God, will.

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To proceed therefore in the Explanation of it.

In the close of the last Chapter before my Text, our Lord tells us, that many that are first shall be last, and the last first: And to prove this Assertion, delivers this Parable.

For the Kingdom of Heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard.

And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard.

Now by the Kingdom of Heaven in this Parable, we are to understand the State of Grace: The Householder is God Almighty; the Vineyard his Church; the Labourers the People of God, that are diligent in glorifying Him, and working out their own Salvation.

By early in the Morning is signify'd God's Readiness, and Forwardness (as I may say) in inviting us to believe and obey the Gospel: His hiring here sets forth to us his gracious Condescension in accepting and rewarding our poor Service, (tho' 'tis every way due to Him) as tho' we were free, and at our own disposal.

Now

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Now this good Householder (as well that others might provide for themselves, as for the doing of His own Work) goes out at other Hours of the Day afterwards; at the Third Hour, which is our Nine in the Morning; at the Sixth, which is our Twelve; at the Ninth, our Three; and the Eleventh, our Five in the Afternoon; to see if any wanted Work: And tho' the Day was never so far spent, yet sends He them into the Vineyard; and gives the Penny of Reward in the Evening, to those that had been but one Hour labouring, as well as to the rest.

And thus does God call us, in Childhood, in Youth, in Manhood, in Old-Age, being ever gracious: And for our Encouragement, and to prevent Despair, the sincere Convert, even in the close of his Days, shall be accepted and rewarded by Him.

To say nothing of the literal Meaning of the Parable; of the commendableness of the Office in those that are rich and able, to set the Poor on Work, and see that none be idle; and to encourage 'em to such honest Labour, by well-rewarding 'em; which is the best kind of Charity:

I say, to pass this, as not so much to my present Purpose: I shall apply myself

self chiefly to consider the Mystical Sense of the Words.

And here we see on the one hand, God's Care to set all on work, in his Church, for the good of their Souls; both by inviting 'em, and encouraging 'em by Reward: And on the other, Man's unreasonable Idleness and Neglect; when the Work is of such Importance, and he has so fair an Opportunity to do it.

In short; the whole Import of my Text, and Explanation of it, is compriz'd in this one Observation: That Spiritual Idleness, or the Neglect of those Duties that concern God's Glory, and our Salvation, is a most shameful and inexcusable Sin.

It is plain, God has appointed us to work out our Salvation in a way of Diligence and Duty: All such then as fail in this Point, can have no good Hope that it shall go well with 'em hereafter.

For who is there of you, that have Servants, will be content to pay Wages to such as trifle away or mispend their Time, and will not put their hands to the Work you set 'em to do?

And can you think then, that God will reward those that have been idle and negligent in his Service?

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Now

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Now in order to shew you the inexcusable-ness of this Sin, in all such as are happily call'd by the Gospel; Let us consider how God has every way encourag'd our Industry, (as in the Concerns of this Life, so especially) in the grand Affair of Religion.

Since then God has made such Provision for us; well may He reprove all Loyerers with a *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

For first of all, God furnishes us with proper Work: He hath provided a Vineyard to employ us in; and that so capacious a one, that there is Room for all that are willing to be employ'd in it.

Other Masters have their stint of Servants, and their proportion of Work; but God's Work (like Himself) is without Limits or Bounds: So that when He has employ'd never so many, He has still proper Business for all that want or desire it.

And He not only furnishes us with proper Business; but gives us likewise Abilities to Work. He has endued us with rational Souls, for the knowing Him our Creator, and His great Works of Wonder. He has placed in us Wills and Affections to direct us in our Actions:

And

And farther adds (if we make a right Use of 'em,) supernatural Powers to assist us in our Endeavours.

He has given us Tongues to express His Praise; to enquire after what we know not, and impart what we have learned.

As He has also given us Hands to receive Good, and impart it, *wherewith we are to labour, working the thing that is good, that we may have to give to him that needeth*: As the Apostle directs, Eph. iv. 28.

Nay farther, (to shew His abundant Good-will to us) He invites, and even presses us to labour for the Salvation of our Souls, by the Exercise of Religion, with a *Why stand ye Idle? Go ye also into the Vineyard.*

And to manifest His exceeding great Care for our Good, He do's this often.

He goes out early in the Morning, to hire Labourers into his Vineyard. He invites betimes, at the entrance of our Age, by the Instruction of Religion, partly by His Ministers, partly by other Occasions, and by the secret Suggestions of His holy Spirit: As not being willing to have us lose any part of our precious Time, or that we shou'd be prepossess'd by any Rival.

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And not thinking it enough to invite us once (though that was more than He was bound to, and Labourers use to seek their Work themselves,) He goes out again at the Third, the Sixth, the Ninth, and the Eleventh Hours. Our loytering, or mispending in worse Service, the former and better part of our Age, does not cause him to turn us off: But at all Hours, at every Age of Life, He invites kindly, admits graciously, and rewards bountifully, all such as will turn in to Him, and Work.

Which leads me to another Motive, or Encouragement to Industry in Religion.

God is a liberal Paymaster: Inasmuch that if we do never so little, so it be with Sincerity, he gives an ample Reward; even a whole Days Wages for one Hours Work.

And though we are all born God's Servants, and by natural Obligation are bound to do Him all the Service we are able; and on the other hand, God is not at all obliged to give any Reward; yet to encourage our Industry, He deals with us in a way of Hire: And knowing our distrustful Temper, He does not only bid us trust to His Goodness, but binds himself by a voluntary Promise to reward us, and specifies (as far as our narrow, carnal

nal Hearts can conceive) what the Reward shall be.

But besides these many Motives and Encouragements that we have from God; we have likewise many Reasons within our selves, why we should expel this shameful Vice of Idleness; and especially in Religious Affairs.

For, as all slothful Persons find by Experience, it is a very tedious and irksome course of Life. He that is not employ'd is a Burden to himself: And the only proper and satisfying Employment is Religion.

For to be ill-employ'd in sinful Matters, or to be impertinently employ'd in Trifles; (as all worldly Things are, taken purely as such) gives not the Soul the Satisfaction it requires.

Nor is Idleness only a wearisome Course of Life, but utterly destructive of our future Well-being.

For as in this Life, the Slothful in Summer often starve or pinch for it in Winter; and the Idle and Careless in Youth, are commonly Beggars in their Age: So in reference to the Life to come, he that loyters away his precious Hours in this time of Grace, that sleeps away, or mispends the Lord's-Day, and neither prays to God, nor thinks of Him any other

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other Day, but lives only to the Flesh; he cannot expect the Penny of Reward; but God will say to him (as to the unprofitable Servant in the Gospel, that made no Improvement of his Talent) *Cast ye him into outer darkness, there shall he weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

Consider farther, that our very Perfection and Blessedness, even in this Life, consists in such acts as are godly and virtuous; which are delightful in the doing, and comfortable in the reflection.

And to provoke us to our Duty; let us consider likewise, how all inferior Creatures are our Patterns, and will condemn us if we are not active in serving God, and do not thereby answer the great End of our Creation.

The heavenly Bodies (according to God's Ordinances) observe their due Courses: *The sun rejoiceth as a strong man to run a race* (Psal. xix. 5.): *The moon and the stars serve to rule the night* (cxxxvi. 9.): *Fire and hail, snow and vapours, stormy wind fulfil his word* (cxlviii. 8.): The Earth is fruitful in an abundant variety; and the Living-creatures thereof rejoice in doing their work.

And shall He, that by the Divine Disposition is Lord and Proprietor of all under God, be slothful and negligent in this

his greatest Concern? Forget that God, that has done all this for him, and be ungrateful and unactive in serving Him? God forbid.

Let our Souls rather be constantly exercised in meditating of His Goodness; our Hearts in loving and delighting in Him; our Tongues in giving incessant Praise to his Name; and our Hands in fulfilling daily all His holy Commandments.

For this will be behaving our selves like Christians, and as those that own themselves indebted for all that they have; their being, and well-being.

This will be answering the great Design of our being sent into this World, where we are required to be all upon the Improvement; for our Master's Charge is, *Occupy till I come* (Luke xix. 13.): And 'tis best for us to fulfil His Orders; for the Time is coming, when we shall be call'd to account for both stock and use.

Give me leave to add this one Observation more, That Idleness exposes us to a World of Temptations.

That evil Spirit in the Gospel, with the seven other Spirits more wicked than himself, all find admission, enter, and dwell in the House, *that was empty, swept and garnished.* (Mat. xii. 44.)

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The Soul that's prepared by Idleness, carnal Security, and superfluous Nicety, (you see) is the Fortrefs that is most ready to admit this foul Fiend. For 'tis easy to gain that strong-hold that is left defenceless, and without any to make resistance.

Now we forfeit God's Protection, who is our surest Guard, by Idleness, as well as Wickedness; who has promised to keep us in all our ways (*Psal. xci. 11.*), but not when we are out of them, or in no way at all.

The Nature of Man, as every one must be sensible, is so inclin'd to action, that when we have nothing to do, we are most easily induced to do amiss; then the Eye hath leisure to wander, the Ear to listen to, the Heart to close with, and the Hand to practise Iniquity.

In short, Idleness is the Nurse that cherishes most Sin, and brings it to perfection.

If an evil Thought be in the Mind, the idle Person has leisure to entertain it, and having once entertain'd it, to think how to accomplish it.

Consider the Case of *Joseph's* Mistress (*Genesis xxxix.*); it appears she had little to do, when she first cast her Eyes upon him with a lustful Intention; as
little,

little, when she made it her business to watch an Opportunity to speak to him Day by Day, to tempt him to her embraces: And what was the Issue? Why, her Passion grew upon her, with her want of business, to such a Degree, as to make her set aside all Modesty, lay hold of him to force his Chastity.

And was not *Amnon's* Case much the same? (*2 Sam. xiii.*) that to his great Vexation and Ruin in the end, gave entertainment Day after Day to his Lust after his Sister *Tamar*?

I need not, I hope, say any more upon this Head.

Considering (therefore the many) Reasons and Motives I have given you why we should abhor Idleness: What remains, but that I endeavour to incite you to godly Dilligence; in glorifying God, in working out your own Salvation, and setting forward that of your Neighbours.

And this I shall do, not so much by pressing Persuasions, as by directing you to those Helps and Means that you may be assisted (to practise by.

For 'tis usual for Persons to be persuaded, and seem to be resolved; and yet for want of taking a right Method in Practice, to make both Persuasions and Resolutions fruitless.

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First then, we are always to remember, that the great Author and first Mover of all our Activeness in serving God, and promoting our own Salvation, is the Divine Spirit: Our sufficiency is of God, as the Apostle teaches, 2 Cor. iii. 5.

And this we are all the rather to mind, lest we be puff'd up with a vain Conceit of our selves, to the great Offence of that holy Spirit; *that always resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble only.* James iv. 6.

This point then being agreed on; your next care, in order to make us active and fruitful in good works, is to have fellowship (as much as may be) with holy and virtuous Persons.

For as all Grace is from God originally, so instrumentally it is from His People.

The Apostle compares the whole Church of Christ to a natural Body, (1 Cor. xii.)

And who is there that knows not what Communication, and mutual Assistance there is between Member and Member?

Although therefore all Grace is from God, (as I before observ'd) yet it is usually convey'd and improv'd by Means: As for Instance; by a good Discourse, good Advice, an holy Example, or the like.

And

And therefore are we oblig'd in the next place, as we tender our own good and happiness, to make a conscientious use of God's holy Word and Sacraments, which He has graciously provided for us, to exercise our selves in.

These are the most effectual Means of begetting and nourishing Grace in us.

By a constant Course then of reading, hearing, meditating and communicating, so fill up all your vacant time, as utterly to exclude all Idleness.

But do this too with due attention and care, so as to understand (as far as may be) the Sense and Meaning of what you read or hear; for otherwise, it will be of little service to you either to read or hear: and endeavour to imprint, and lay it up in your Minds as much as possible, that it may be of use to you in the future Conduct of your Lives; and serve not only for a Guide to direct you, but a Rule to examine your Conversations by.

But here I must remind you, that in order to make all your endeavours successful, you must ever remember to keep constantly on foot the great Duty of Prayer to God, both publick and private.

As to publick Prayer; give due and regular Attendance, and for shame leave

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off that lazy Practice of dropping into the Congregation, to the great Disturbance of their Devotion, after the Service is begun, or (as you too often order it) when 'tis almost done.

And here, from the Words of my Text, *Why stand ye here idle?* I cannot but lay hold of the Opportunity offer'd, to take notice of the scandalous Custom of such as stand gazing and loitering without, after Prayers are begun, as tho' they had no part to bear in them.

Whereas our Church-Service is so contrived, that every one is concern'd to attend from the very beginning.

And he that is ignorant of this, I am afraid has no notion (I'm sure he cannot have a right one) of the Excellency of the Service, and how far he is interested in every individual part of it; and consequently, for want of duly confessing his Sins, and receiving the Benefit of Absolution, (with which the Service begins) 'tis more than to be suspected, that he will not be a Partaker of the Blessings begg'd in the ensuing Prayers.

I hope therefore, such as have been guilty in this respect, will, from this warning, for the future take care (for their own sakes) of giving scandal in this shameful Manner, and provoking
God

God not to hear their Petitions: for surely they will not pretend to say, that God has not called them; or to answer with those in my Text, *that they are not hired.*

But then as to private Devotion; Pray in secret Morning and Evening at least: I will not say what more is proper; but without these it is scarce possible to be a Christian, nor have we reason to expect daily Blessings from Him, that has taught us to ask 'em daily.

Pray therefore without ceasing, (as the Apostle directs, *1 Thes. v. 17.*) and let no Day pass without calling upon Him, from whom every good Gift comes, twice at least, always making it your earnest Endeavour to recommend your Prayers to the Throne of Grace, by true devoutness both of Soul and Body.

And in order to bring the Body to a due Temper, (which has so immediate an Influence upon the Soul) 'tis requisite that we use Godly Abstinence, and especially upon stated Occasions; that we may be the better fitted and prepar'd for the constant Performance of this necessary Duty: Ever remembering to guard ourselves most against those Gratifications of Sense, that stupify and engender Sloth,
make

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make us negligent of our Duty, and will in the end drive us from God.

The last Means that I shall prescribe, to prevent Sloth and Idleness, in our Religious Affairs, is the constant Exercise of Christian Watchfulness.

There are none of you but may be sensible, what a number of Dangers and Temptations we are always expos'd to.

Against these our Lord has taught us to Watch as well as Pray, *Mark xiv. 38.*

Whenever therefore we find our Thoughts grow vain and loose; 'tis our Business then more especially, to set 'em upon some more serious Employment.

In order to which it will be proper for you to learn the Art of holy Meditation; both fixed, and occasional. Fixed: Upon the Lord's-day especially; after hearing the Scriptures, or a Sermon, or after attending upon any other holy Duty. For then is the special Season to chew the Gud, to ruminate upon, and imprint what you have heard in your Minds, that it may thoroughly affect your Hearts.

Occasional: Upon any particular Passage of Life, that may more nearly concern you.

But to close all with a short Exhortation.

Waste not your precious Time in Sloth;
nor give your selves up to a thoughtless,
indolent course of Life: But when you
are doing, see that you do God's Work
too.

For there is an Activeness that is worse
than Idleness, 'Tis better to sit still, than
travel a wrong way.

You see, I am speaking of Spiritual
Idleness. 'Tis not rising early, going to
Bed late, and eating the Bread of Care-
fulness; 'tis not carking and caring, toil-
ing and pinching, to get the Things of
this World, that I am exhorting you
to:

(There's too much of that already in
many) but to Diligence in Religion.

Nor is it any kind of diligence in Re-
ligion I am pressing you to.

For as Satan (upon occasion) trans-
forms himself into an Angel of Light:
So some Hypocrites are industrious to im-
pose

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pose upon the World, in order to serve their own vile Ends.

Neither let our activeness be like that of the Scribes and Pharisees, who compass'd Sea and Land to make a Profelyte: there is too much of this Pharisaical Zeal and Diligence among the Enemies of our pure Church on both Hands; whilst we are generally too easy and unconcern'd in the Matter.

But let our activeness in Religion be to serve God, and not Men; not for our Bodies and earthly Interests, but for our Souls, and a heavenly Inheritance.

For which we are invited to labour in this Vineyard of the Lord's Church; wherein, if upon our Call we behave our selves as true Labourers, we are sure to receive in the end whatsoever is right, that is, an ample Reward for all our labours.

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Which that we may all do, God of His infinite Mercy grant, for His blessed Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Redeemer.

To whom with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be all honour and glory, praise and thanksgiving, now and for evermore.

F I N I S.

